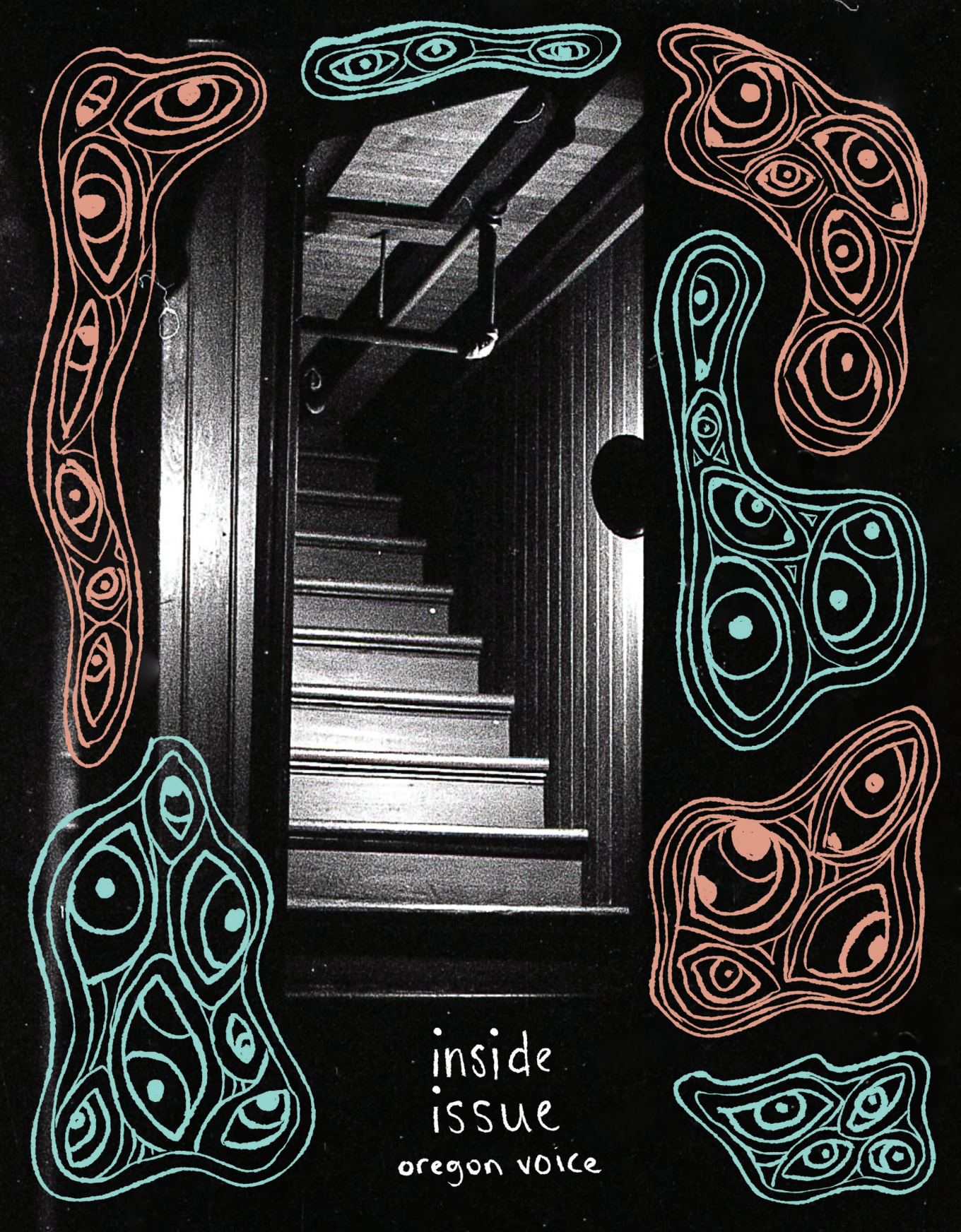
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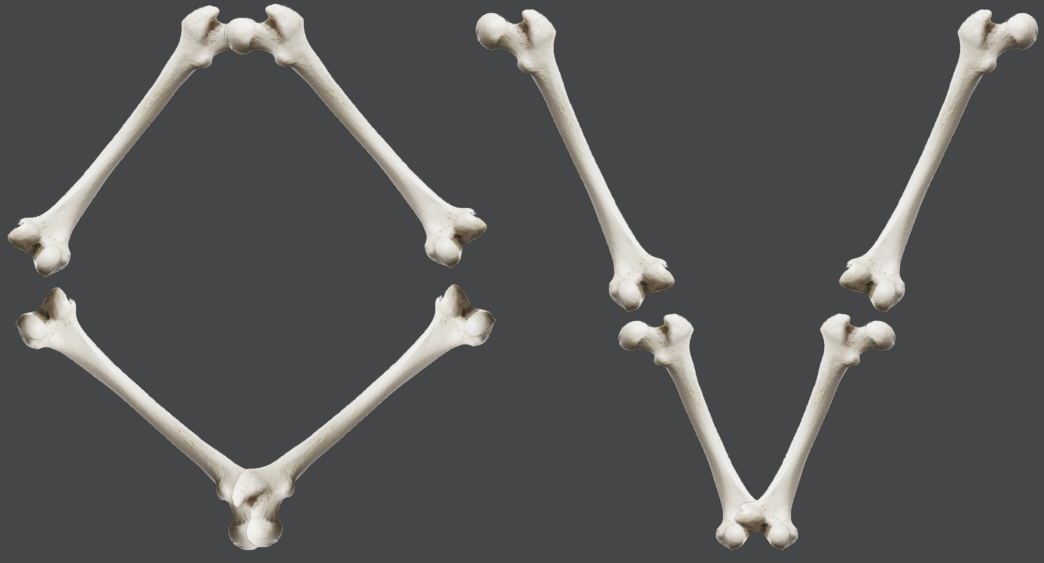

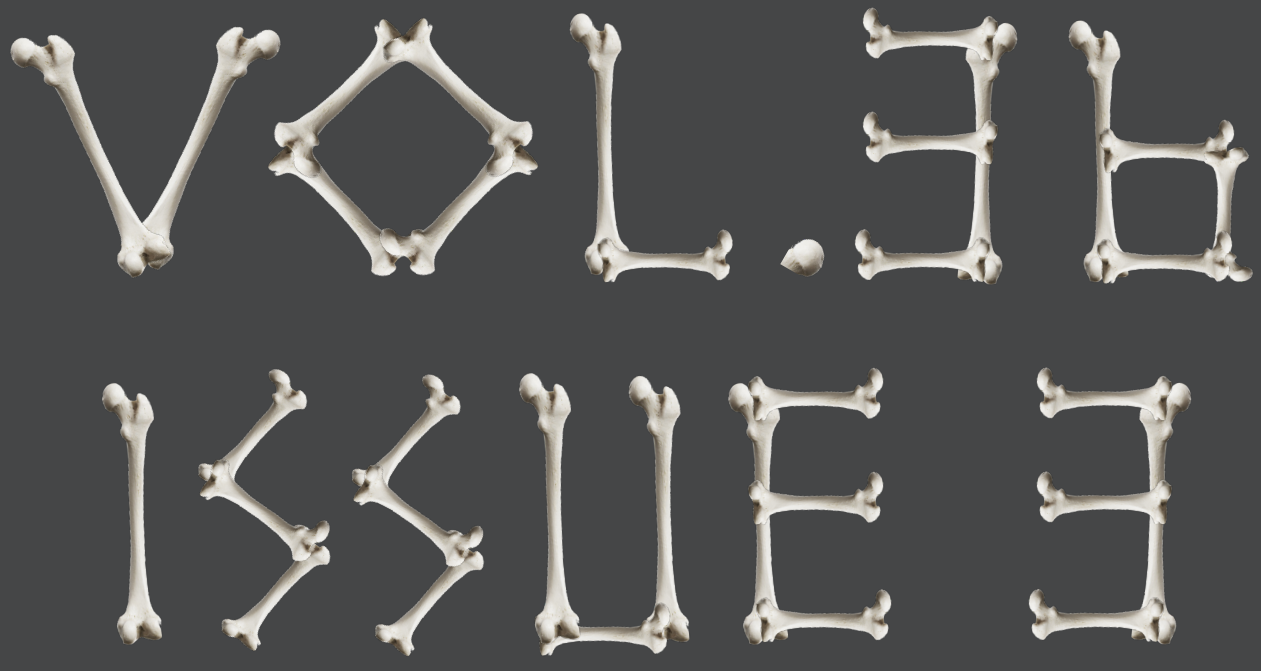
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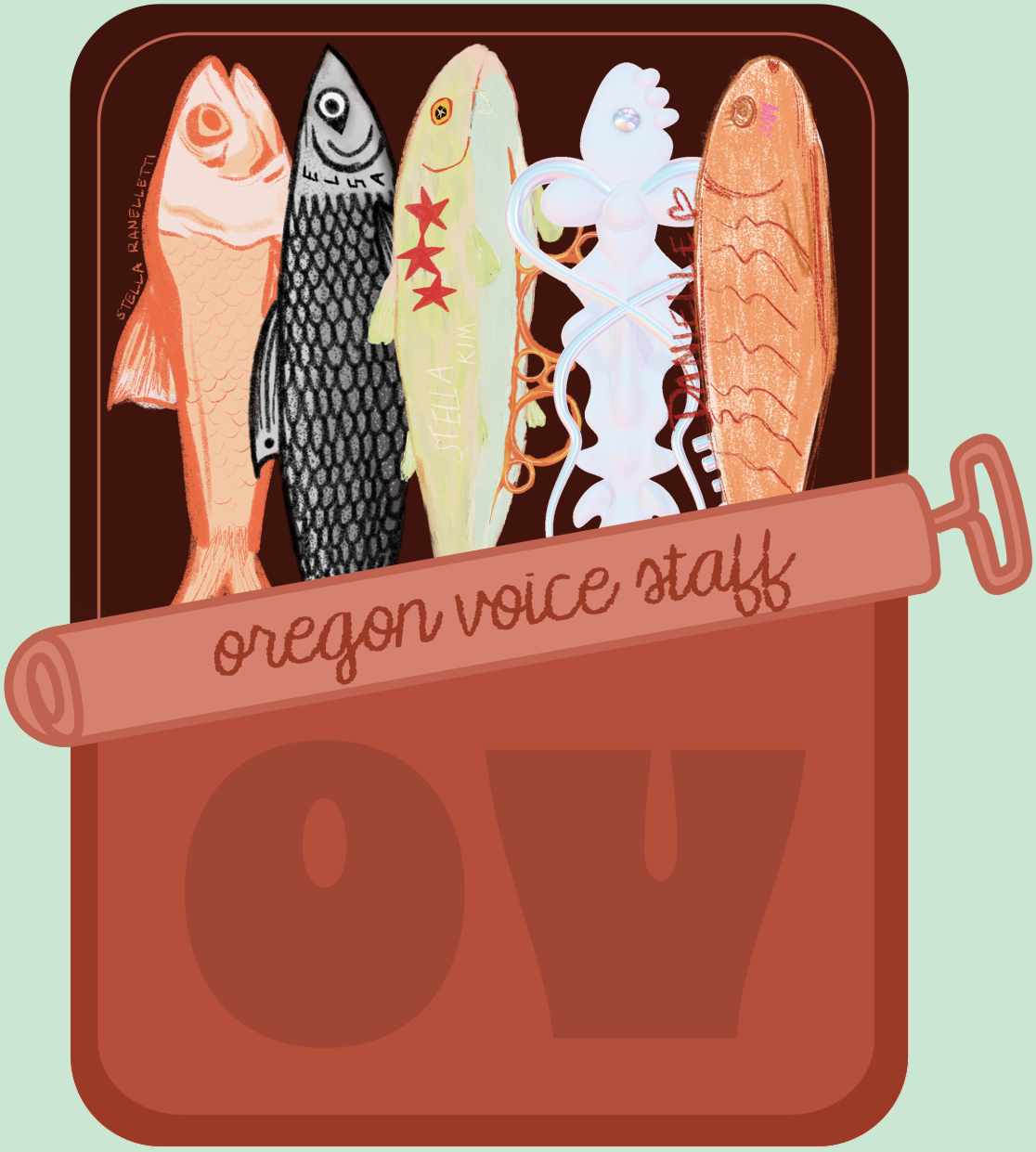

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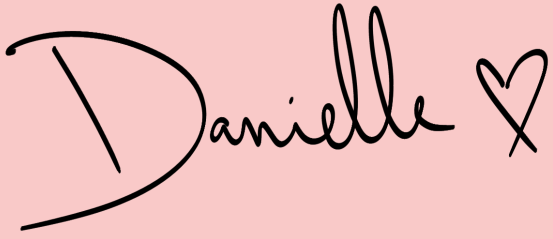
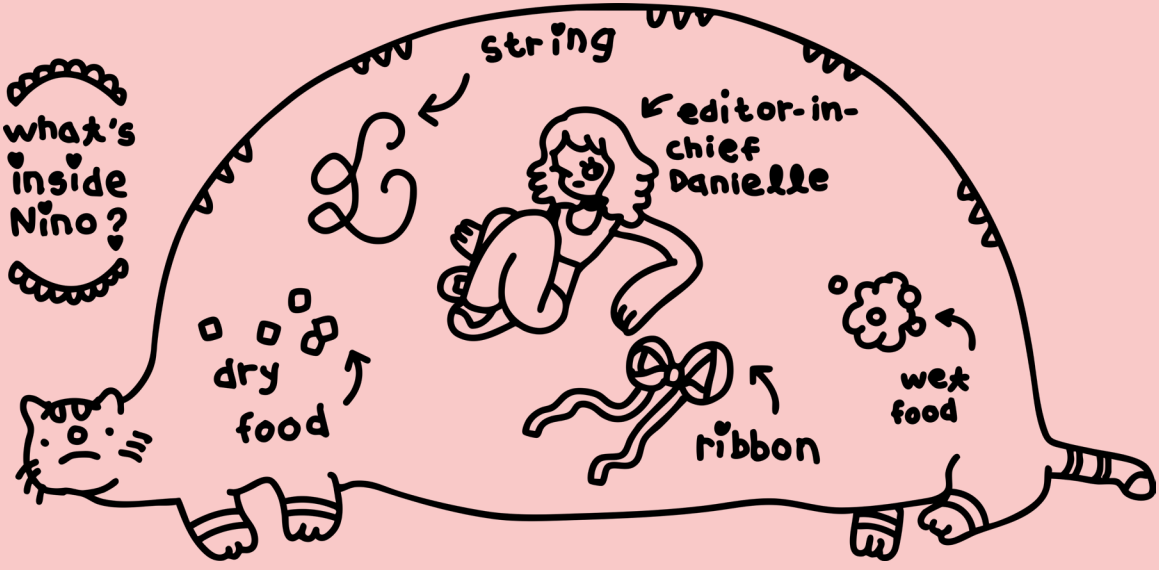
Letter from the Editor

Well it's my last issue with Oregon Voice. I'll miss this little magazine and all the fun we had! It squeezes me inside a little to think about the end of my time at University of Oregon...and that's kind of what this issue is all about: the stuff that squeezes you inside. The hairline fractures and splinters, the stuff that cuts you deep and won't let up. All the blood and bone and closets and hallways, the things you go inside of and the things inside you. So take a look around and lean into the toothache, push on the bruise, scratch at the scar, and let it all in.

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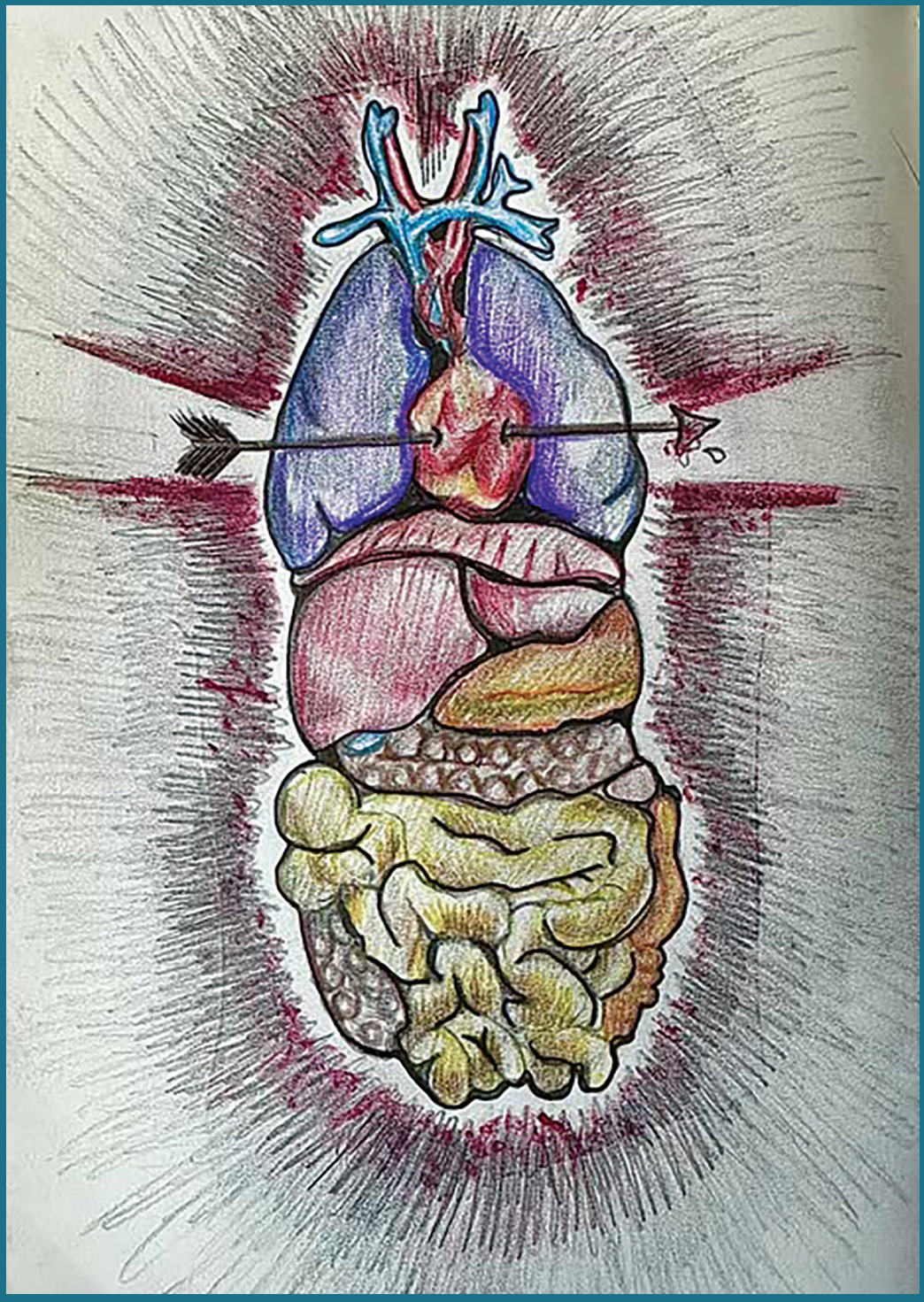
string
editor-in-chief Danielle
dry food
wet food
ribbon



The Passion

along the swelling crimson crescent beach,
a misplaced doll sleeps sweetly on the sand,
where tides are swaying barely within reach—
enough to briefly pinch the doll's wet hands.

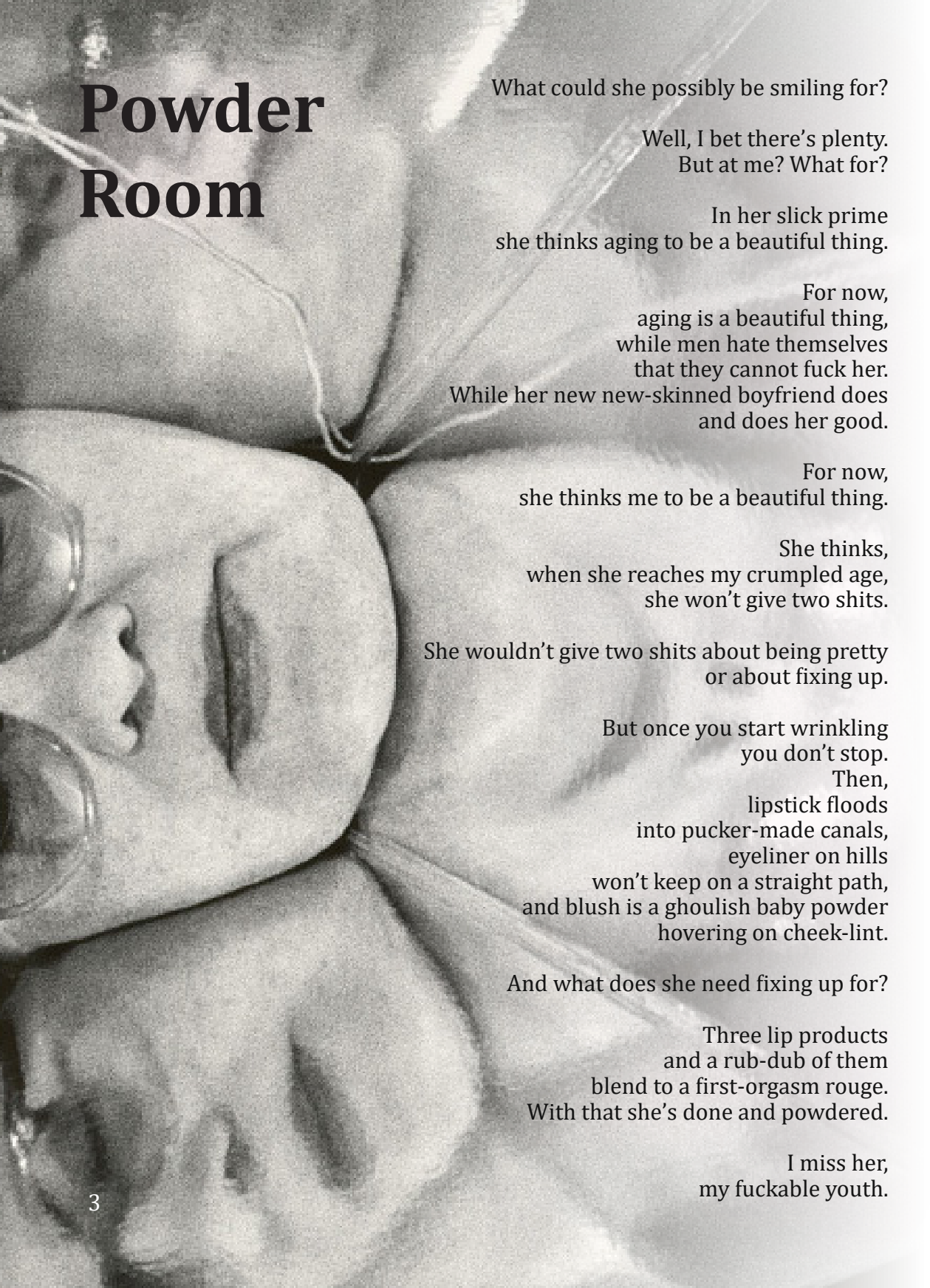
the small nicks run across her wooden shell;
they shimmer faintly on her face with ease,
much like the rays of this dim dusking spell
along the swelling crimson crescent beach.

loose marble-eyes stare always at the sky,
as slow-trying waves ebb away again.
but when the night expels the foaming tides,
a misplaced doll sleeps sweetly on the sand.

she waits for guidance from the dipper stars
that hang over her pining dreams high, which
draw her to the shadowy shore afar
where tides are swaying barely within reach.

another night has called her to her dream.
another tide has came to kiss the sand;
all quickly flees the ever-fruitless scene—
enough to briefly pinch the doll's wet hands.

Perished



Powder Room

What could she possibly be smiling for?

Well, I bet there's plenty.
But at me? What for?

In her slick prime
she thinks aging to be a beautiful thing.

For now,
aging is a beautiful thing,
while men hate themselves
that they cannot fuck her.
While her new new-skinned boyfriend does
and does her good.

For now,
she thinks me to be a beautiful thing.

She thinks,
when she reaches my crumpled age,
she won't give two shits.

She wouldn't give two shits about being pretty
or about fixing up.

But once you start wrinkling
you don't stop.
Then,
lipstick floods
into pucker-made canals,
eyeliner on hills
won't keep on a straight path,
and blush is a ghoulish baby powder
hovering on cheek-lint.

And what does she need fixing up for?

Three lip products
and a rub-dub of them
blend to a first-orgasm rouge.
With that she's done and powdered.

I miss her,
my fuckable youth.

I. I've been thinking a lot about myself.
I'm shaving it clean; I'm sweating it out.
I am going to dig a hole, far underground, and I am going to put a little man in there. A little doll who doesn't look like anyone. I am going to bury him in the yard.
The best part is that you'll never see me. I have made myself unnavigable.

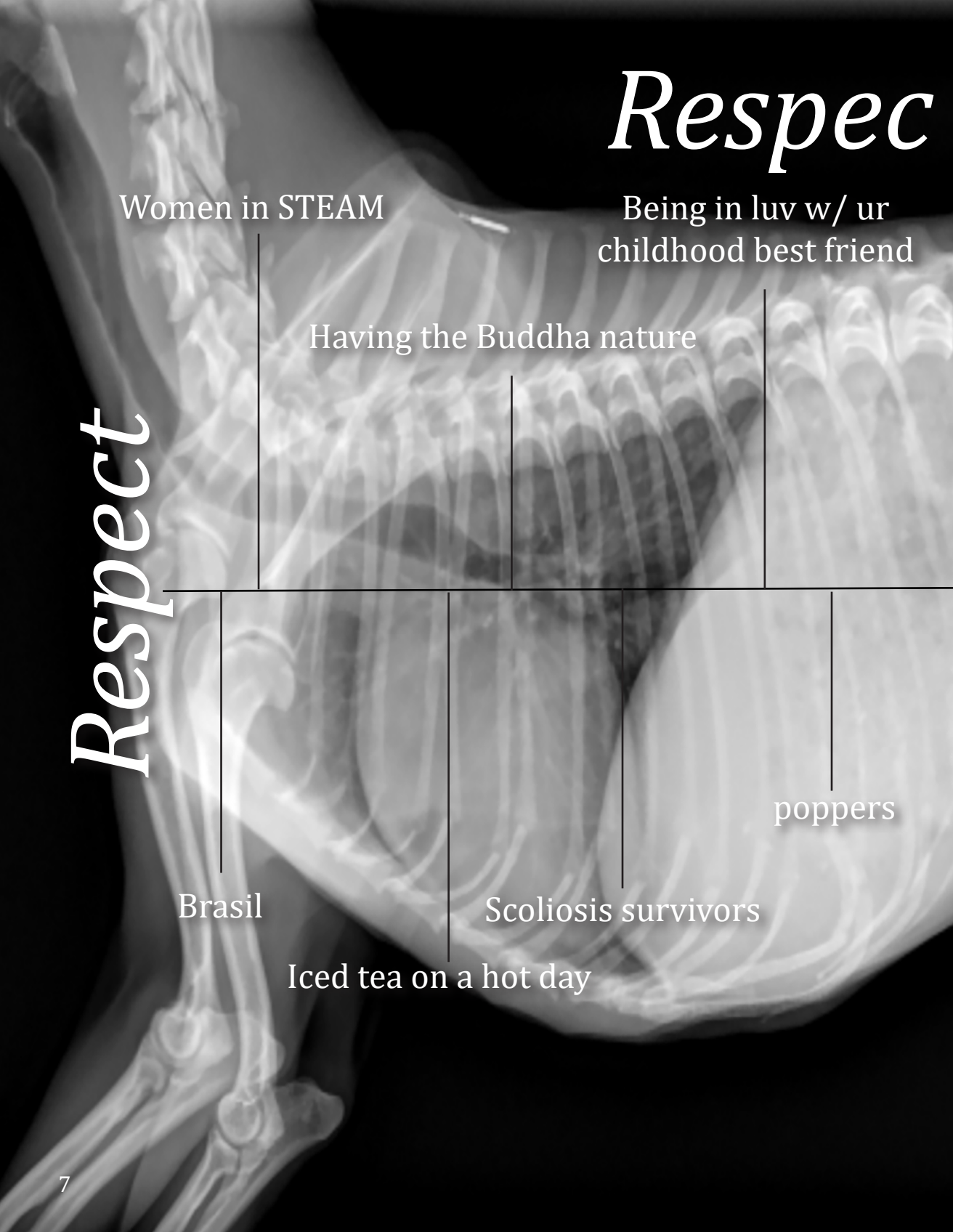
II. Make a map, make a maze, make a baby.
You don't have to love any of it.
Your hands running over the water, looking for one last place to land. You can beg for harbor, but all you'll taste is the salt.

III. Find your father and kill him. Find your father and pray. For his forgiveness, for yours.
For the nine fucking years and all the blood. Find mercy. Find a bull.
Because in my story, he's just a kid.

IV. It'll never end. The maze, I mean.
You'll never find the minotaur. The minotaur being you. You being a boy. Small.
I like it better this way.

V. You've made a bedroom out of the caldera. Here it comes: the big one.
Now you're an arm's length away. An axe-swing's distance.
Writing's on the wall. See, the fault line is due.
Now the caldera is caving and you cry,
I can't find my way home.
The boy says, "You're my mother's mother's mother, and I've got an empty stomach."
The girl says, "That's the gift of being like this. When I was in my mother, she was in hers.
All our unformed hands holding the unspent time together."
So kill the beast, then, and save the girl. Take it. Kill the boy
I meant the bull.
You know what I meant.
Shout, "It's all over!" because no one will tell you otherwise. This is how you dump out the labyrinth.
This is you making it right.
"Thanks for saving me," says the girl.
The baby in her belly is holding hands with the baby in its belly.
No babies yet, though. Wait.

VI. She never made it out alive.


Respec
Women in STEAM
Being in luv w/ ur childhood best friend
Having the Buddha nature
Respect
poppers
Brasil
Scoliosis survivors
Iced tea on a hot day

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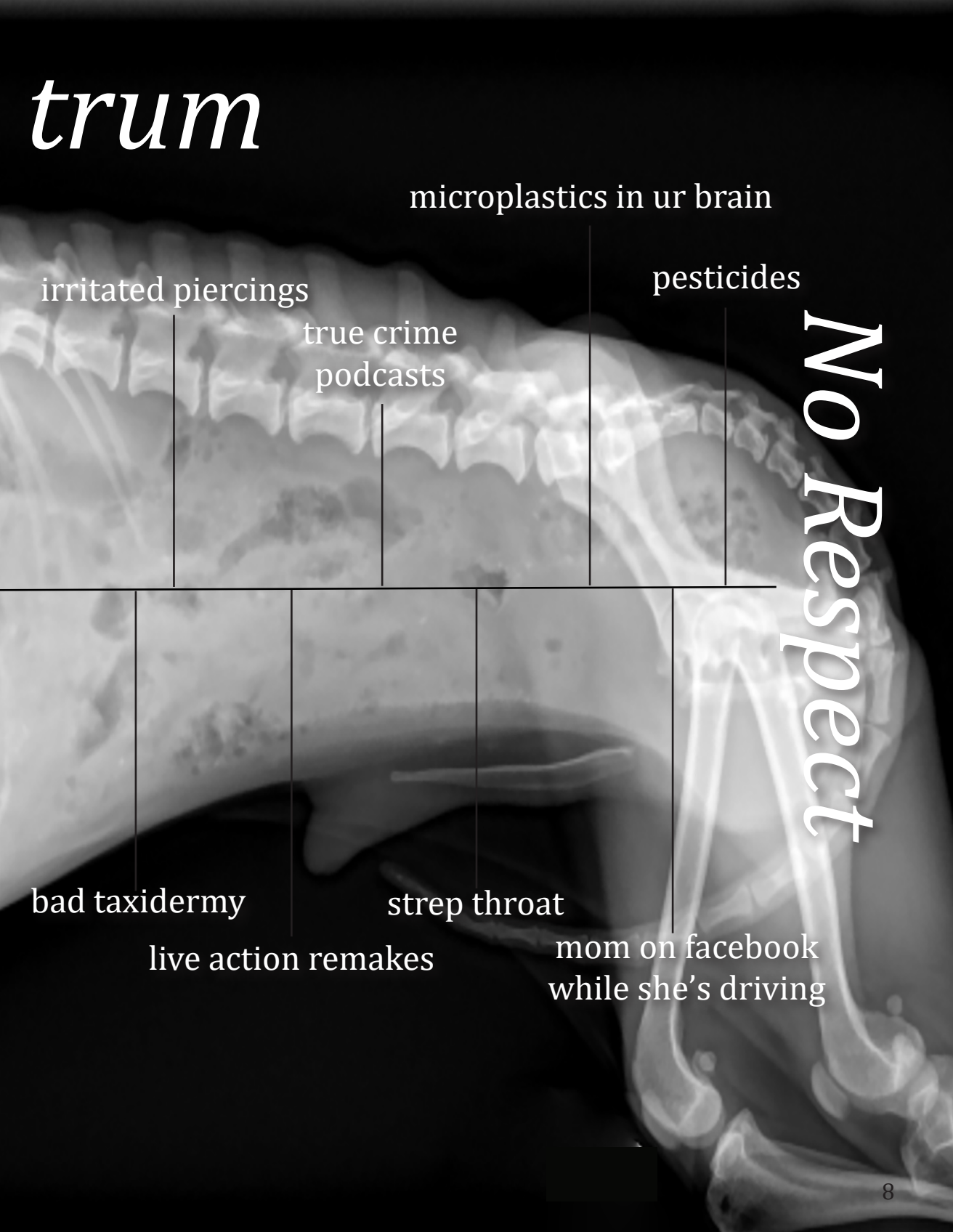

microplastics in ur brain
irritated piercings
pesticides
true crime
podcasts
No Respect
bad taxidermy
strep throat
live action remakes
mom on facebook
while she's driving

TWO HOURS AWAY

From the beginning of time, humans have adopted the ability to feel a sense of home. A tug that pulls them back to a space that's theirs, things they own, people they love. The tug that keeps a sense of purpose, and when taken away, leaves a hollow blues. Homesickness. The yearning ache that feels almost like a phenomenon; a muscle memory rather than a longing, the act of reaching for something that exists, but is not within arm span. It sneaks up on late walks home, the smell of warm grass, the songs playing at the grocery store. It's not dramatic, but rather quiet and slow-burning.

Three years ago, I moved from my parents home in Southern Oregon to Eugene. Only two hours away, that's it. "It's not that far," my mom promised me, loading up the car for my dorm move in. I wasn't so sure. Homesickness doesn't care about the miles in between; missing my father's cooking or the sound of my mother walking around in the morning doesn't get smaller just because I'm only two hours away.

I wasn't too wrong to be worried. The first few weeks of living in the dorms were tough. My room was unfamiliar, like a hotel room or summer camp. I felt lonely, yet I was always surrounded by friends. In secret, I silently longed for everything back home; I missed my pets, my friends, my family, my bed. I missed being known without having to explain. I wasn't the only one, but it seemed like it.

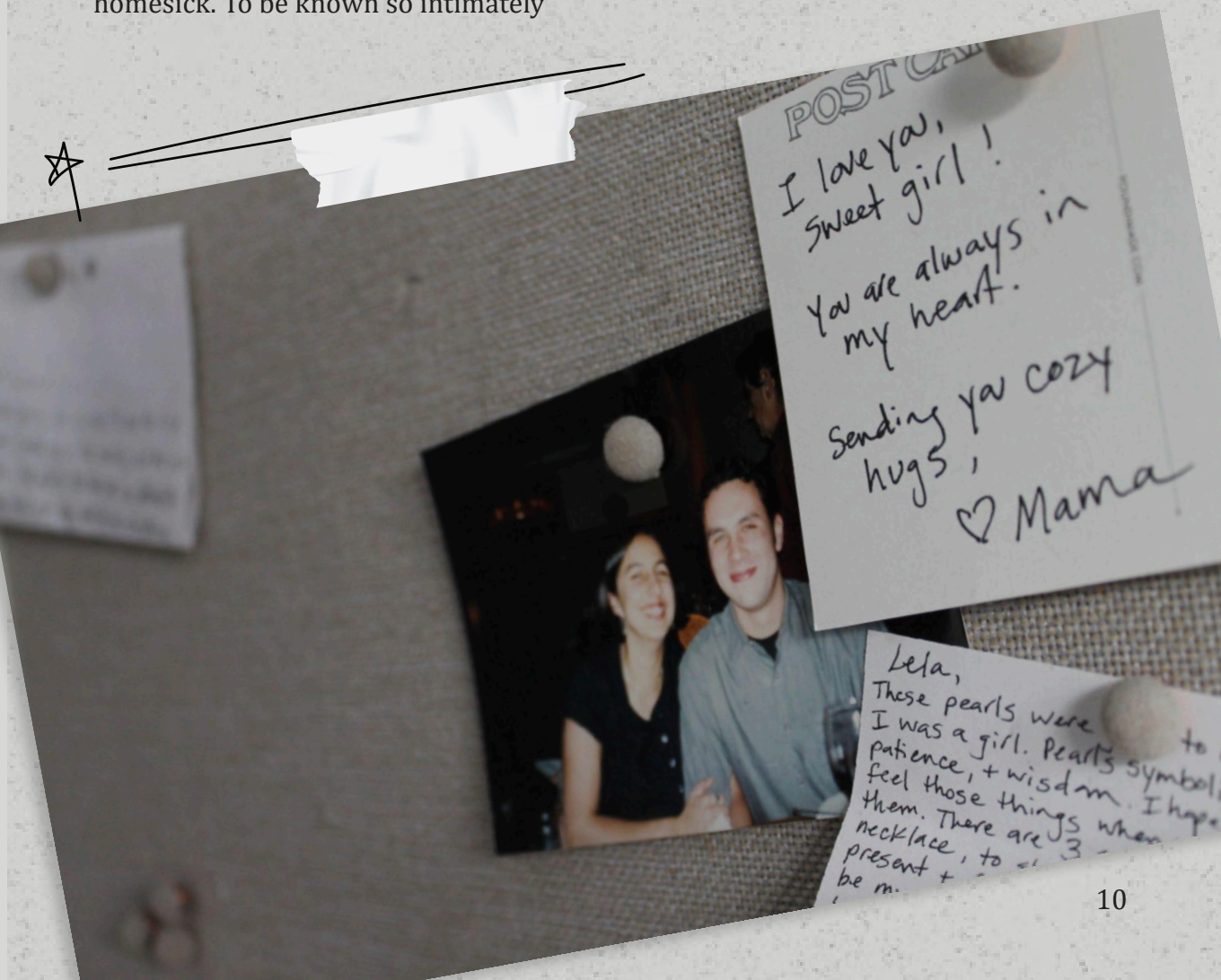
As time went by, I grew to open my mind to the idea that I can miss how things were, and also develop a new sense of how life will be. I found people who felt warm and wanted to have fun. Friends who reminded me of cousins I grew up with, and also friends who didn't. I started building rituals for myself; finding a balance of combining things that reminded me of home with new things I never did. Listening to old songs my grandmother used to play on the way to class, and listening to a new artist I discovered on my way home. Putting up a framed photo of my cat on my desk, right next to a photo of me and my new friends at a football game. I found I was still "allowed" to grieve my childhood, but I had the ability to wipe my tears and pick myself up.

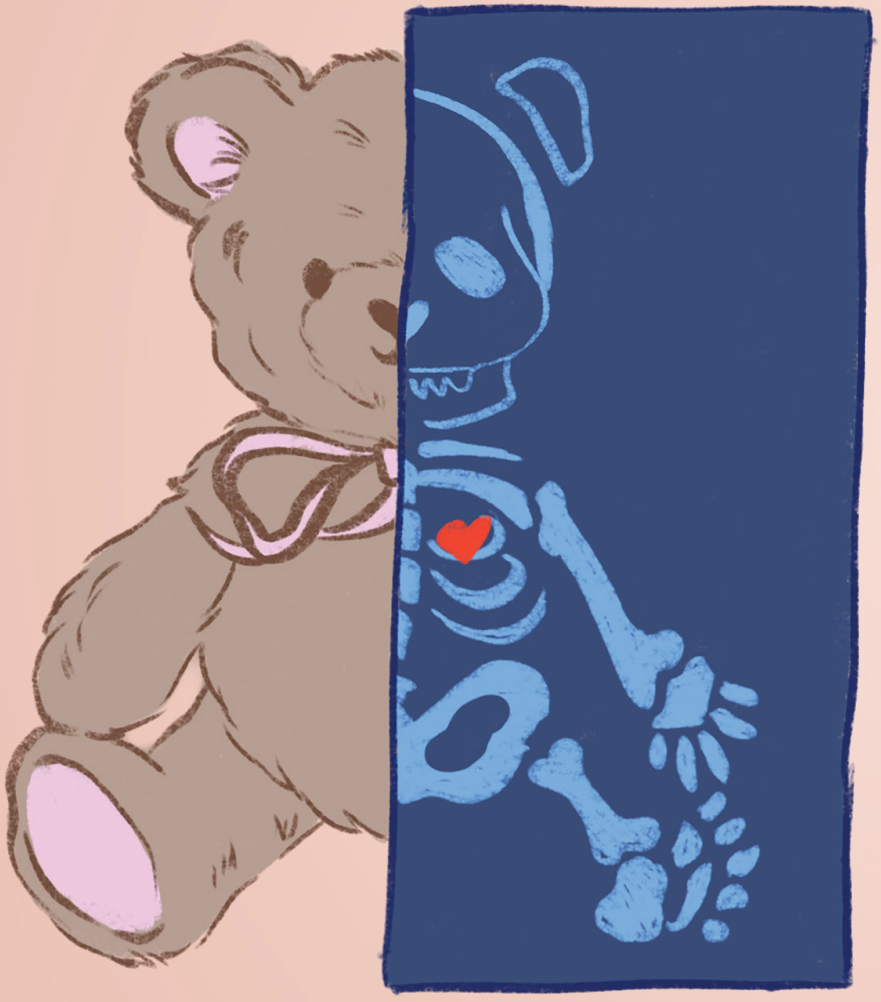
Of course, things shifted. Change is always daunting and uncertain in the beginning, but new things cannot be new forever. You will always adjust. I surprised myself, as I now love college. I can't imagine being anywhere else. I love living with my best friends, creating my own schedule, adapting to a sense of

independence. My life feels like mine– messy, loud, sunny, scary, and wonderful. The homesickness is still there. It always will be. It's just quieter now, like a song I know by heart lulling in the background. Familiar, yes, but not overwhelming.

The aching is just proof that I have something worth aching for. My childhood home held me with such gentleness that it left a lasting imprint. The quiet consistency of routines that I followed for years still lives in me, just in a different way. I am so lucky to feel homesick. To be known so intimately that the two hour distance feels like grief. It's sort of the magic of growing up: realizing a home doesn't just vanish, but rather forms itself into traits. How I fold my laundry, how I talk on the phone, how I cut my fruit. Now when that familiar ache hits, I remind myself that it's not emptiness I'm feeling–it's the opposite. It's fullness, comfort, and warmth, carried over years of growing and changing. It's all love, just in another form.

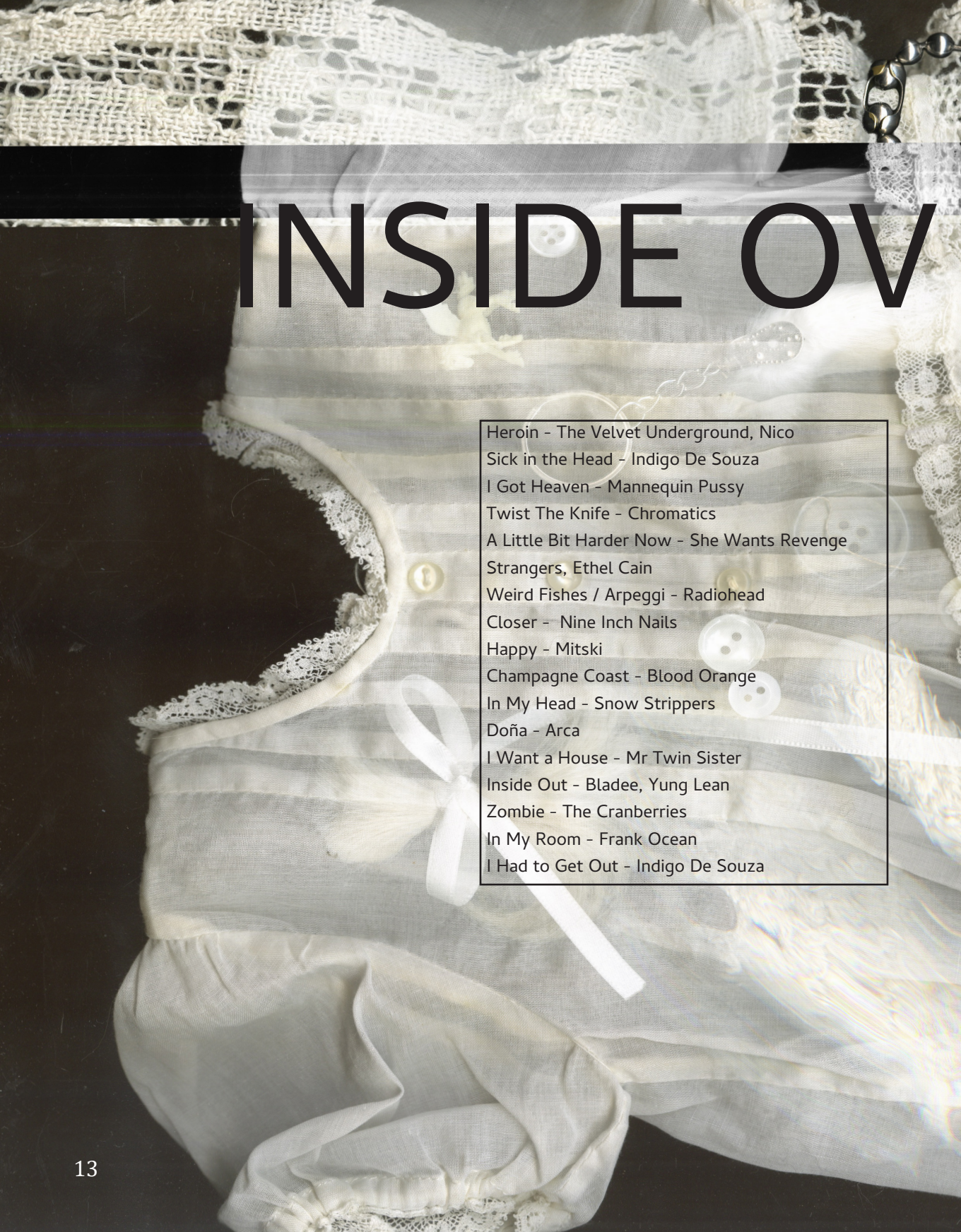
Two hours away has never felt closer. <3





What's the weirdest dream you've had recently?

- I was pregnant but didn't realize. Went to the hospital to give birth and it was my cat
- Found remains when water-cave-diving but it was just a face in the shape of goggles
- Dreamt of my ex apologizing to me and then exploding, gore and all
- I was blind but I had many arms with which I could see. My sister and my friend walked with me
- My entire family turned into spiders and turned on me (I have a fear of spiders)
- Giant frogs riding skateboards with big cocks trying to kill me and my friends in a play??
- My teeth felt too big and I met Grace Vanderwaal in a public restroom
- I was a bridesmaid at my professor's wedding



INSIDE OV

Heroin - The Velvet Underground, Nico
Sick in the Head - Indigo De Souza
I Got Heaven - Mannequin Pussy
Twist The Knife - Chromatics
A Little Bit Harder Now - She Wants Revenge
Strangers, Ethel Cain
Weird Fishes / Arpeggi - Radiohead
Closer - Nine Inch Nails
Happy - Mitski
Champagne Coast - Blood Orange
In My Head - Snow Strippers
Doña - Arca
I Want a House - Mr Twin Sister
Inside Out - Bladee, Yung Lean
Zombie - The Cranberries
In My Room - Frank Ocean
I Had to Get Out - Indigo De Souza

PLAYLIST

Roseblood - Mazzy Star
Solitude (2014 Remaster) - Black Sabbath
As The World Falls Down - David Bowie
No Surprises - Radiohead
Love Will Tear Us Apart (2020 Remaster)
- Joy Division
Ribs - Lorde
Door - Mitski
Sister Morphine (2009 Mix)
- The Rolling Stones
(Nice Dream) - Radiohead
Where Is My Mind? - Pixies
What Was That - Lorde
She's Lost Control (2007 Remaster)
- Joy Division
Door - Caroline Polachek
Lost In My Bedroom - Sky Ferriera

The Front Yard In Between Monsoon Rains

Monsoon season is a waiting game. The rain is powerful and incessant, described by Arundhati Roy as thousands of silver bullets pelting the earth. But once the clouds have wrung themselves out, the sun quickly dries the cement that makes up the driveway of my grandparents' house. As the dampness disappeared my cousins and I would grab the soft red rocks that lined the edges of the porch, the ones that you could draw with. We'd draw elaborate hopscotch maps and jump around our illustrations until the soles of our feet were caked with dirt and grime.

This never was a game that lasted for long, though – as soon as the clouds covered the sun and the first fat raindrop hit our heads, we'd drop the rocks and sprint to the covered porch, grinning as we reveled in beating the ensuing downpour. And so our days flew by, an endless endeavor of playtime and creativity within the landscape of our front yard.

Every morning, I would fetch my grandfather that day's Malayalam Manorama from the little newspaper slot on the gate. I'd sit with him and my mom on the porch, eating muttapam dipped in honey as they sipped their chai. My early rising was undoubtedly the result of my immense restlessness as a kid – I could never hold still.

Some time after I fetched the newspaper, the milkman would push open the gate and I would run to him with the specific pot my grandmother had designated for milk. He would measure out his two cups, the liquid frothering as he poured it into the pot.

There was a little pond in the grassy knoll in the front yard, past the trellis that was home to the sweet smelling jasmine. Two prickly cacti sprouted from the ground next to it, their survival thwarting the odds of their genes in this environment. My cousins, sister and I would dare each other to press our fingers against the spikes, laughing when one

of us inevitably pulled our hands away.

There was a surprising abundance of life in that pond, despite our general neglect for its maintenance. We'd spy tiny fish swimming in the murky water, or spot a frog perched along the edge of the rocks. Most often though, we'd run after the dainty white and yellow butterflies that flitted over our heads. We'd jump and pounce with our hands outstretched in a futile effort to catch them.

One year, we spotted an iridescent dragonfly, glinting blue and green as it perched on a rock. I ran into the house to the fruit bowl sitting on the dining table and grabbed the half-sphere net that protected it from fruit flies. Armed with two of those, I snuck to where the dragonfly sat, and as it fluttered its wings, brought the two nets around it. Finally I had caught one of these creatures – I paraded it around for my family to see, and begrudgingly let it go when I realized there was no way I could keep it as a pet.

Holding the black iron bars of the front gate, my feet tiptoeing off the bottom ledge, I took a deep breath and screamed, "CHAKKI!"

My voice carried over the road in front our house and up the stone stairs leading up to the house across the street. A woman was sweeping outside, her pink sari thrown over her shoulder as the rough bristles of the choolu scritch-scratched along the hard earth. My call reached her ears and she disappeared into the home. Just as I was getting impatient, sucking air into my lungs to yell again, I saw a flicker of movement at their door, and there she was. Chakki deftly picked her way down the stairs, the pink soles of her dark brown feet flashing. Her long, shiny black braids flipped in the wind as she crossed the street – something which I was simultaneously envious of and in awe of her ability to do, I was never allowed to cross a main road let alone a busy one, by myself. Before I knew it I was unlatching the gate for her and we were running in the grass together,

with not a care in the world. Malayalam flowed from our mouths the way rain poured from the sky: slowly at first, and then all at once.

Sometimes, my sister, my cousin would join us. We'd create elaborate stories and pick roles for each of us to play. The minutes bled together and faded away in our childlike bliss. There were these big trees that lined the walls next to the gate of the house. Chakki would pick the leaves, these big flat shiny green ones, and make magic happen. She would rip and fold them in intricate ways, creating little accessories for us to add to our games. We would play until someone would summon Chakki back to her house with a yell from the other side of the street.

For years, we'd connect in the front yard of my grandparents house, indulging in our wonderful childlike fantasies – until one year, when she stopped coming. When the call went unanswered for too many days in a row, my mother told me, "she started working."

Working? She was only a year older than me. The injustice of her circumstance was lost to me as a child, who was simply mourning the loss of a cherished playmate.

Last summer, I collected milk from the very same milkman when I visited India. He mentioned how much I had grown. I noted the extra wrinkles in his face, the gray in his hair and beard. A few months ago, I found out that he had passed away. This man, whose name I shamefully do not even know, witnessed me grow up in a beautifully disjointed way, all while providing my family with the very thing that people tell you will make you grow up strong and healthy. There's some beautiful symmetry in that.

Coming back to these formative places and memories and moments in an adult body is jarring. The house that Chakki used to live in across the street is long gone, bulldozed down to a flattened patch of land that a junkyard now calls

its home. Chakki herself, I lost all contact with. My mother tells me that she now lived a mere 5 minute drive away from my grandparents' home, with her husband and toddler child. This was just as unsettling and reality-shifting for me as learning of the milkman's death.

While I am gallivanting away at college, complaining about midterms and how busy I am, she is experiencing motherhood. My childhood friend, the one who could so skillfully manipulate those leaves and would run around laughing and screaming with me – was a wife. Our life trajectories, though briefly and intermittently intertwined, have taken us in severely opposite directions.

My cousins and I rarely see each other in India anymore. A lot of my family doesn't even live in India anymore. Our tharavad is spread across continents. The time between stepping foot in my grandparents' house gets wider and wider. Each time, it feels a little more alien. I feel like a giant walking around in a fairy garden. The jasmine trellis that we used to summit as our Mt. Everest is at eye level now. The bannisters along the staircase no longer feel like towering bars. I have to lean down to wash my hands in the dining room sink rather than tiptoe to reach it. The red rocks by the porch lie unused. The leaves of the trees stay mercifully attached.

Yet though I have changed in both size and disposition, the realities of my grandparents' house still stay the same. The pond still holds frogs, the cacti still stand proudly. The butterflies still flit around and the mailman still brings the newspaper every morning. These are memories that live in a quiet sunlit place in my head, wrapped with care and fondness and the smells of my tropical homeland. The ghosts of the past haunt these spaces, continue to exist in the hallways of my mind. And somewhere deep inside me remains a child who longs to catch dragonflies with her friend from across the street, her cousins, and her little sister.

Inside Every Woman

I'm sitting in class, but focus escapes me. My mind swirls with gnawing worry. I've made a huge mistake, an unforgivable social misstep. Oh God.

Why did I even wear a skirt today? It was too hot for pants. I liked how it matched my eyes. But now I'm the girl who wears a mini skirt and boots to class. That's a fate worse than death if you ask me.

This is a serious class, one with an old man professor who wears suits and reads off ugly slides. I stare down at the rows of politely covered legs, mine standing out like beacons of shining whoreishness in a sea of blue jeans and sensible khakis.

Do I look pretty right now? If I'm going to be a Mini Skirt Girl™ , I better be doing it right. I straighten my posture, put on some lip gloss, lingering on my lips for longer than usual. If I can't be respectable, I can still be desired.

I don't dare stand up or raise my hand. I must keep myself quiet, mysterious, unaffected. Smallness is only armor against the judgment I must face for my crime. My sharpened awareness of my physical form makes the me-inside-my-head fearfully peer out, bracing to see the hundreds of horrified eyes on my terrestrial body.

But there are none. The eyes I see do not graze over my bare legs. Instead, they watch the board. They viciously stare, not at me, but at the practice problems we have been assigned. I hear the thunder of backpacks zipping and chairs legs dragging across the linoleum floor. Oh fuck. Class is over. I've spent an hour thinking about the back of my head, my legs, my face, all for nothing. All this self-awareness and nothing to show for it, except a cold sweat and a B+ average.

We file out, none of us thinking much of one another, only fighting invisible battles within the hidden world of ourselves.

What a waste.

TESTINA

there are scattered shards from a broken
vase after a baseball flies through the window.
nostalgia is ricocheting in my memory
as i am left to piece together the post-it notes
that were tucked away along with your letter—
now leaking slowly from the faulty tap.
drip and drap, the words fall. tip and tap,
the memory is collecting the broken
bits and pieces to reveal the unopened letter.
moments are sitting asemically by the window,
just tippily for the wind to blow the notes,
the laughter, and the jokes from my memory.
How do I throw away those memories?
illustrated instruction for fixing the faulty tap
is not clear. nothing is explained in my notes;
there are only diagrams to the once broken
vase decorated in gold seams—like the window
decorated plainly in gold alphabet letters.
i have not forgotten that unopened letter.
i merely kept it in the pocket of my memory—
away from the brittle vase, the open window,
the lone baseball, and the faulty tap—
because a youthful promise that is broken
by neglect can never regain its absent notes.
carefully, i fetch the flaking leaflet of notes,
ignoring the tear at the corner of the letter.
i chase the shards, while a stubborn, broken
promise exposes a diluted memory
of when I childishly took apart the faulty tap,
only for all the parts to fly out the window.
the baseball is left resting by the window,
casually to not disturb the disorganized notes.
this time, i make sure to cherish the tap.
after stowing the post-it notes and the letter
back in the deepest pocket of my memory,
i write a memo to myself about the broken.
Close the window and open the letter;
Arrange the notes scattered in the memory;
Let the broken leak from the faulty tap.

this

o

window

lock

x-ray

tongue

a glass

microplastics

veneers

closet

ranch

piercing

hot tub

perform open heart surgery

i will kill you

r

that

door

key

mri

teeth

plastic cup

macroplastics

buccal fat removal

wardrobe

honey mustard

tattoo

kiddie pool

receive open heart surgery

you will kill me

DREAMS

There's deep comfort in the past
It's as if I'm slipping into an old sweater that still carries the scent of home

My memories don't just return they embrace me,
Like arms reaching out
Like a mother gathering her child closer,
enfolding me in the softness of yesterday's light

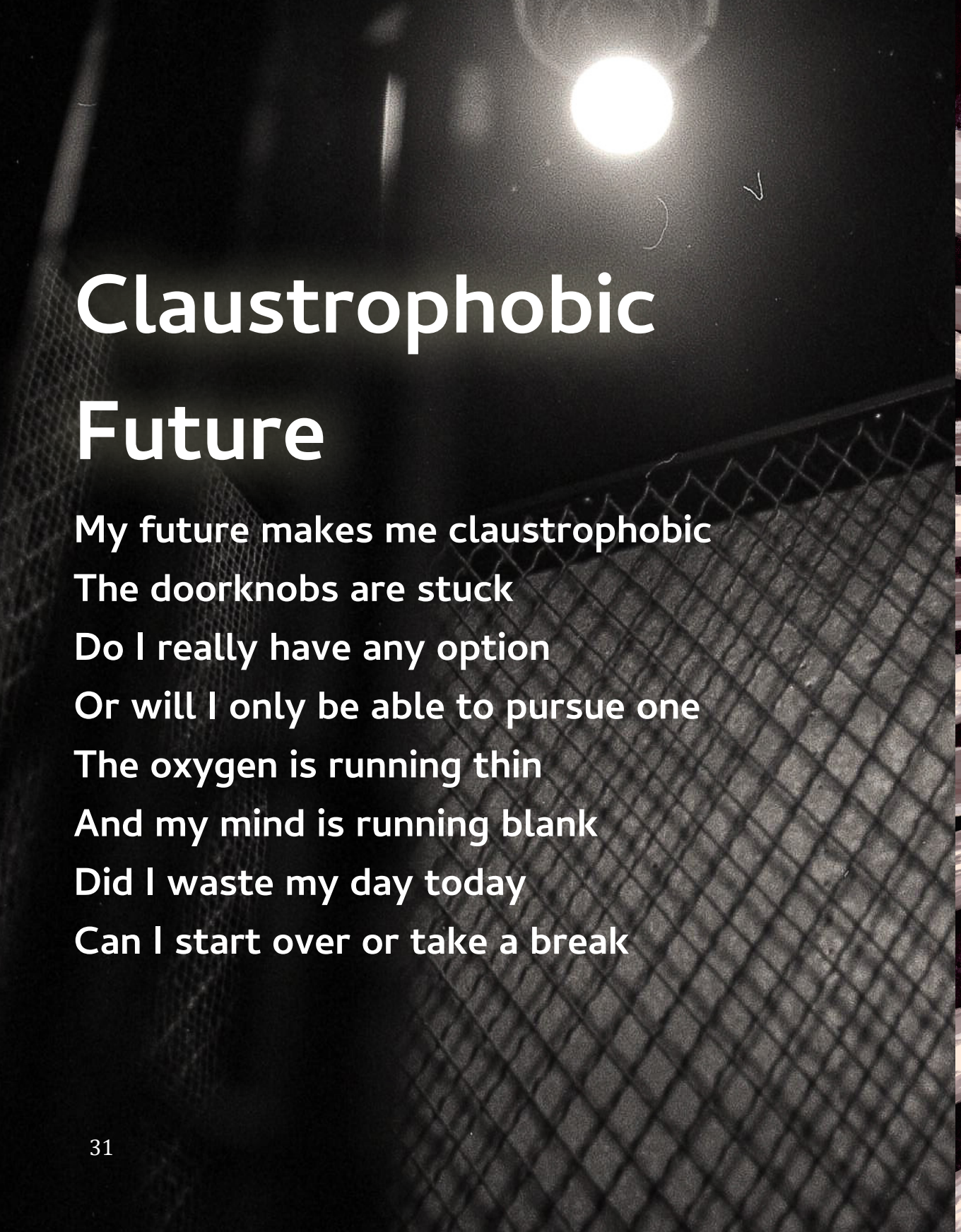
They whisper warmth into my boones,
reminding me of summer fields and lullabies at dusk

But sweetness stings.
I'm no longer the little girl with wind tangled pigtails,
riding shotgun in papa's pickup,
laughing as gravel kicks up behind us

The fields are gone
paved over by time and necessity
And now, when fever sets in or the world grows too loud,
there is no hand on my forehead
no voice to hum me to sleep

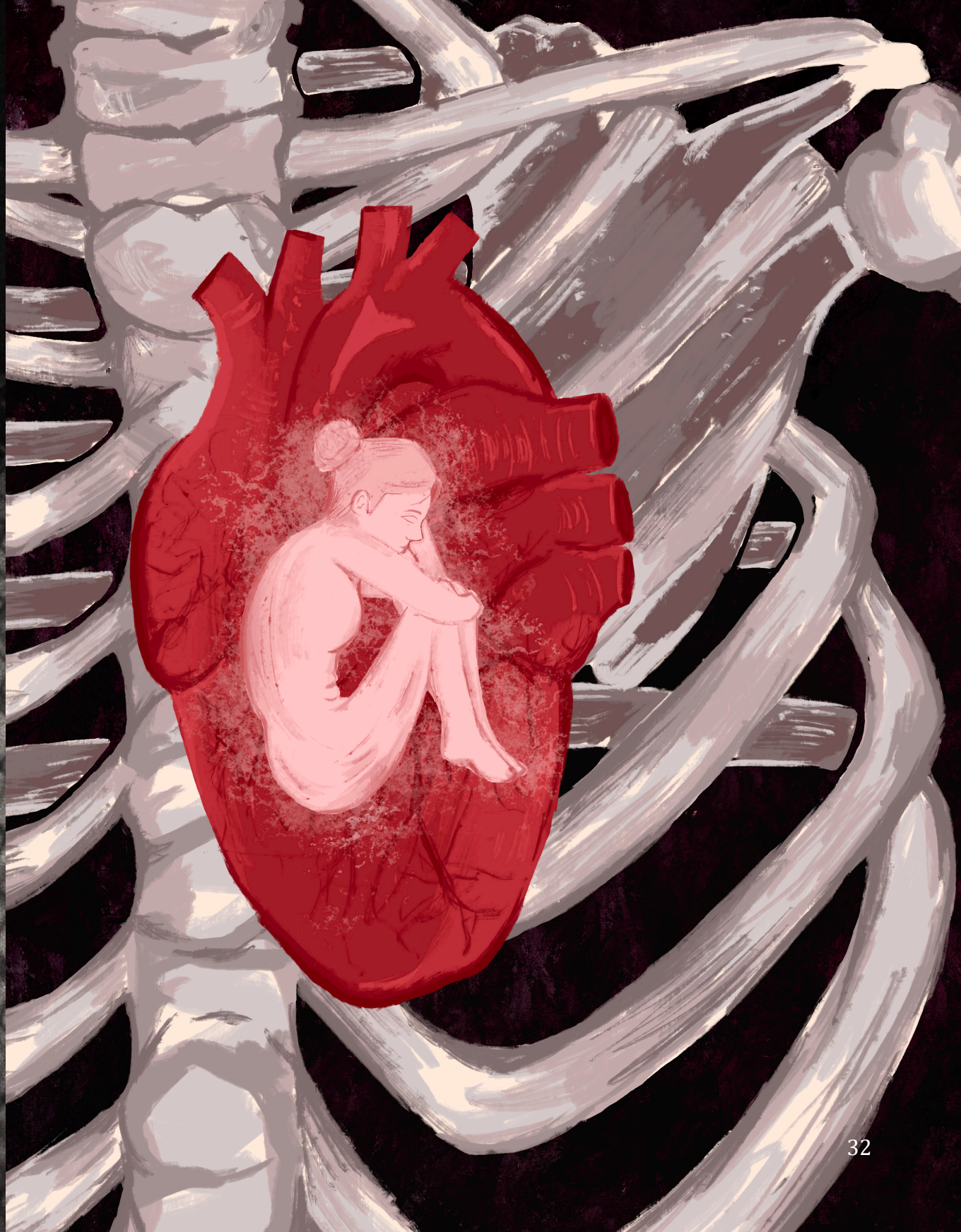
What does the voice of your inner monologue sound like?

- Von Dutch by Charli XCX feat. Addison Rae timestamp 1:39
- Kermit da Froggg
- My sister
- A more deliberate me
- Jennifer Coolidge
- RuPaul
- Meryl Streep
- An 80 year old British man named Nigel
- The Earl of Lemongrab



Claustrophobic Future

My future makes me claustrophobic
The doorknobs are stuck
Do I really have any option
Or will I only be able to pursue one
The oxygen is running thin
And my mind is running blank
Did I waste my day today
Can I start over or take a break



Inside Search

A A U C A A M Y G D A L A E
A C U E L M D D I A R Y N P
P O R L L A R T Y R T L E O
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O Y A E A E W P N N S E C E
E R S E C R E T N T O Z C V
L E D A Z C R U A F L P U N
R T I Y R E T U P E C D E E
Y R A L H E M F E M U R O A
E A H A P A A H U D J R D E
L A C I E D P A I B I T L M
A A P R A L L E T A P Y E A
G E D L O U C A P S U L E Y
A E C A C H R Y S A L I S A

ENVELOPE
DRAWER
DIARY
CHRYSALIS
DREAM
TIBIA

FEMUR
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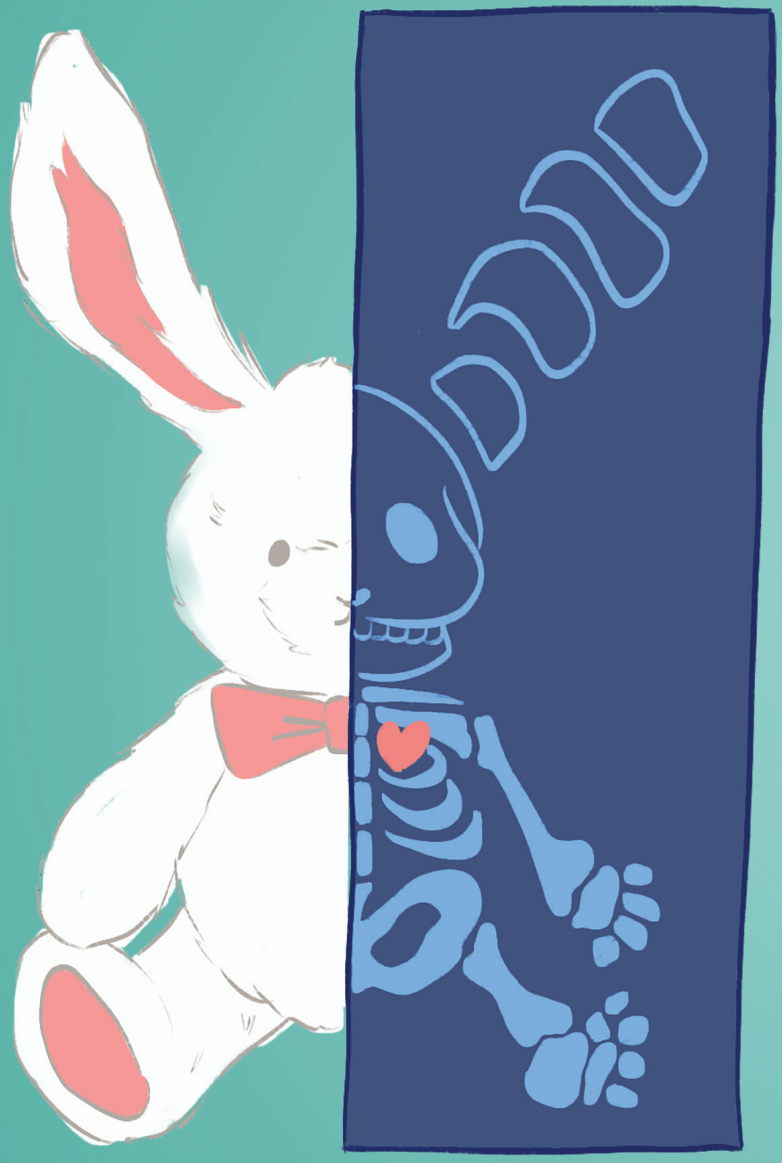
ARTERY
PIPE
MAZE
CLOSET

AMYGDALA
PATELLA
JAR
TUNNEL
PIT
CAPSULE

TALK LOUDER
AS I CANNOT UNDERSTAND YOU OVER THE UNCERTAINTY WITHIN YOUR VOICE
YOU SAY I DON'T KNOW WHO I AM
BUT THAT IS YOU

I'LL TELL YOU MY FAVORITE FLOWER IS BABY'S BREATH
BUT IT IS ROSES
AS MY GRANDMOTHER ONCE COOKED WITH THE PETAL PICKED FROM HER GARDEN
I HOLD DISDAIN FOR THE COLOR PURPLE
AND I ONLY WRITE IN PEN AS IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE AN ADULT
I'M KIND
AND IF YOU ASK MY FRIENDS TO DESCRIBE ME THEY WOULD SPEAK OF THE SHARED LAUGHS WE'VE HAD OVER BITS TAKEN TOO FAR
I MAKE MY BED EACH MORNING, EVEN WHEN RUNNING LATE
AND EACH NIGHT I TAKE OFF MY MAKEUP, NO MATTER MY STATE

BUT PROJECTION IS A BEAUTIFUL THING,
YOU TELL ME TO SPEAK LOUDER,
THAT I DO NOT KNOW WHO I AM
BUT IT IS YOU I CANNOT HEAR,
AND IT IS YOU YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND



What would you bleed if you didn't bleed blood?

- Cherry coke
- Beautiful ladies probably
- English breakfast tea
- Ranch dressing
- Orange Peach Mango juice from Trader Joe's
- Resin
- Probably Oregon's tap water. I drink a lot of it.
- Chocolate probably
- Honey and toothpaste
- Dr. Pepper
- Green tea
- Glitter
- Alphabet soup
- Glitter glue
- Discount salted caramel syrup from Marshall's
- Tears

68M, Married with Kids

“Ah, yeap, I’m back.

What’d I get? Y’know that’s really a man’s private business.

Ah. Well, I got bananas. Some toothbrushes. There’s two in there.

It’s a value pack in case you or your mom needs a new one.

That ol’ one you got’s looking pretty frayed—why don’t you take it?

Yeah yeah, take it. An onion, s’more garlic. Beef liver—that’s my dinner.

You and your mom are going over to Auntie Darcy’s tonight, right?

Ah. Y’know you should really try it—before making that face.

Liver is good for you. Good source of protein. Vitamins, minerals.

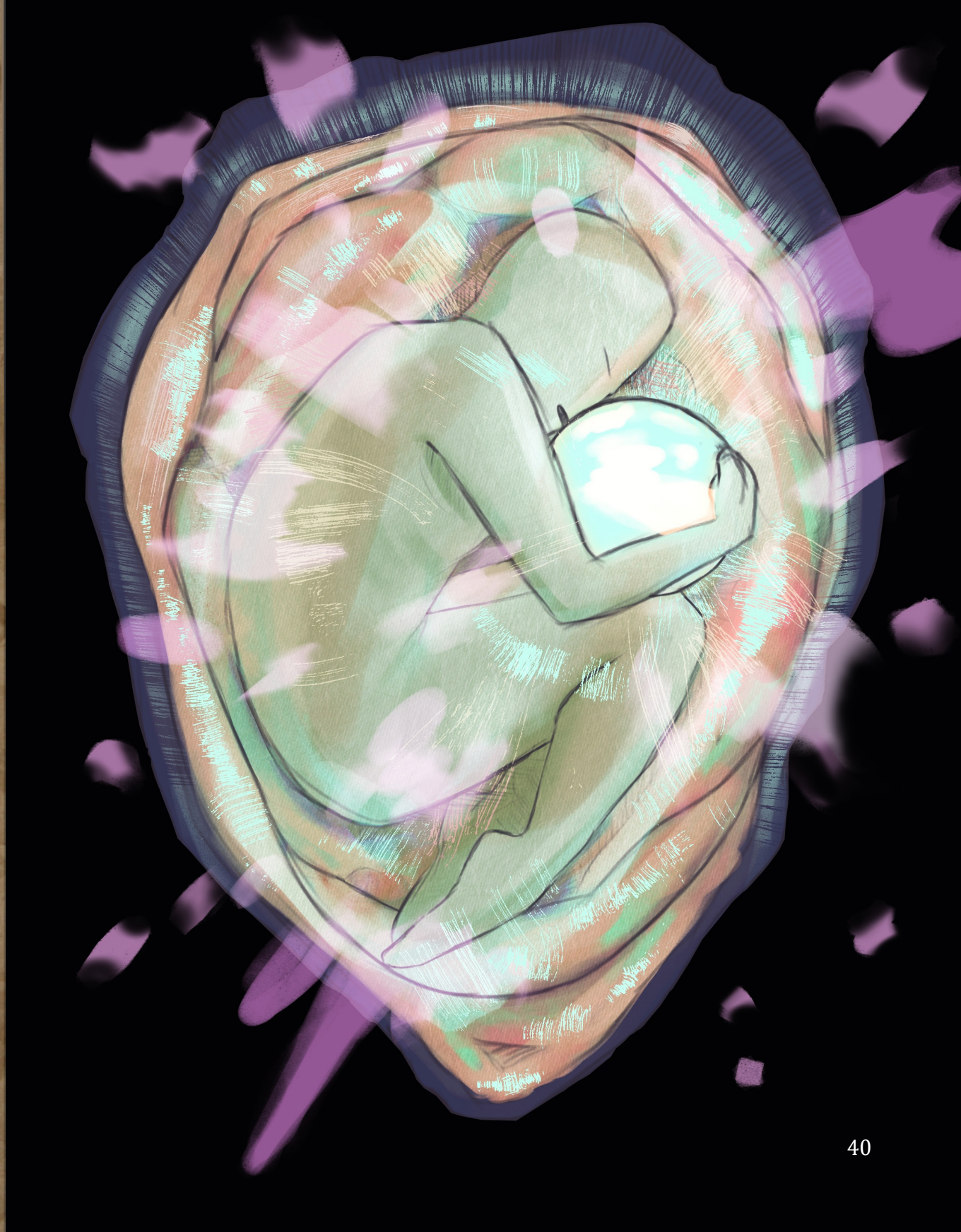
Your papa makes it pretty good, too. Uhm, let’s see. A value pack of deodorant.

Might as well get more bang for your buck. Nu-Salt. It’s ah—salt substitute.

For my blood pressure. Got dental floss. A value pack. Might as well.

S’more razors. Why don’t ya use those girly pink ones I got you, n’ lay off mine?

No, no—they work just the same. Ah. What a bunch of hooey.”



I stood surrounded by barred walls holding my ID above my head. Behind me, Richardson Bay in the Bay Area of California. In front of me, San Quentin State Prison. I walked in with six of my co-workers from my summer internship. We were there for a meeting with the incarcerated men we work with at our nonprofit, Humans of San Quentin. All summer, I read letters from people in prisons across the country, but today I would be shaking their hands.

When you step inside of San Quentin, its initial beauty almost makes you forget where you are. The tip of Mount Tamalpais pokes out behind the prison's historic walls and potted plants decorate the courtyard in front of me. Dante was the first person that I met inside. He shook the hands of everyone around me and told us he was in for attempted murder. Every person I met told me their crimes as if they were telling me about their year in school or their major. I wasn't quite sure how to respond. I couldn't just say "oh, cool!" as I might to a peer telling me their academic interests or hobbies.

He led us to his nine-by-five cell that he shared with another man. I tried to ignore the men peering down at me from the five levels of cells that towered above. I was in their space. Their home. I understood they were going to look at me, a 21-year-old female in their all-male prison. I was out of place and a reminder of their current state.

The men on the rec yard wore variations of what they call their "state blues". They have a combination of jeans, blue pants, a blue shirt, white shorts, a white shirt, and all grey sweats. All I knew about prison, aside from the stories I read during my internship, was from television. My understanding was narrow, and my life had been privileged considering I only knew one person who was incarcerated until now. I didn't expect there to be so much creativity. From the way they decorated their cell to the way they personalized their style; these men took what little they were issued and turned it into something of their own.

In the education center, I sat with a team of incarcerated tutors who helped men study to get their GEDs. According to Michael, a 65-year-old serial bank robber who spent hours tutoring his peers, the average literacy rate in San Quentin was that of a 4th grader. Nevertheless, hurdles were surpassed and the impossible seemed to come to life. Coby, an Irish gang member, told me he learned to read during his seven years in solitary confinement.

I found myself slowly growing comfortable in this environment. Making conversation with the men around me and learning about their past life, current experiences, and future hopes. When we stood back in the courtyard to leave, Dante made me realize once again how my privilege can get in the way of reality. He pointed in the distance and asked what we saw. I scanned my environment: people playing basketball, the freeway, a couple of seagulls, a man running. Wrong. My eyes, the ones who got to leave at the end of the day, saw these minute details. But their eyes, the ones who might spend a lifetime here, saw the massive wall that separated them from the outside.

Dante told us that even though it seemed beautiful, and the people seemed friendly, we were still in a prison. Some of the people inside had spent years working on their reform and preparing to make their impact on the world better than before they went to San Quentin. But just four days before I came to the prison, three people were murdered by other incarcerated people. It wasn't a movie, and it wasn't just a field trip. The only thing that separates you and me, he said to us, is one bad decision.

INSIDE

THE WATER BRIDGE

The
water bridge

On days like this
when it rains hard
our pathways flood
and the worms rise
stretching on cement.

The water bridges
invite them from dirt
for a celebration
that's always across
the death zone.

Feet pound down
on their way
to their own celebration

My simple walk has
been obstructed
by limbless
faceless
mouth-is-also-a-butt
creatures.

Through the travel
I see those struck
fresh
silent kills
a shoe, a softness,
a stillness, a mush,
the rain.

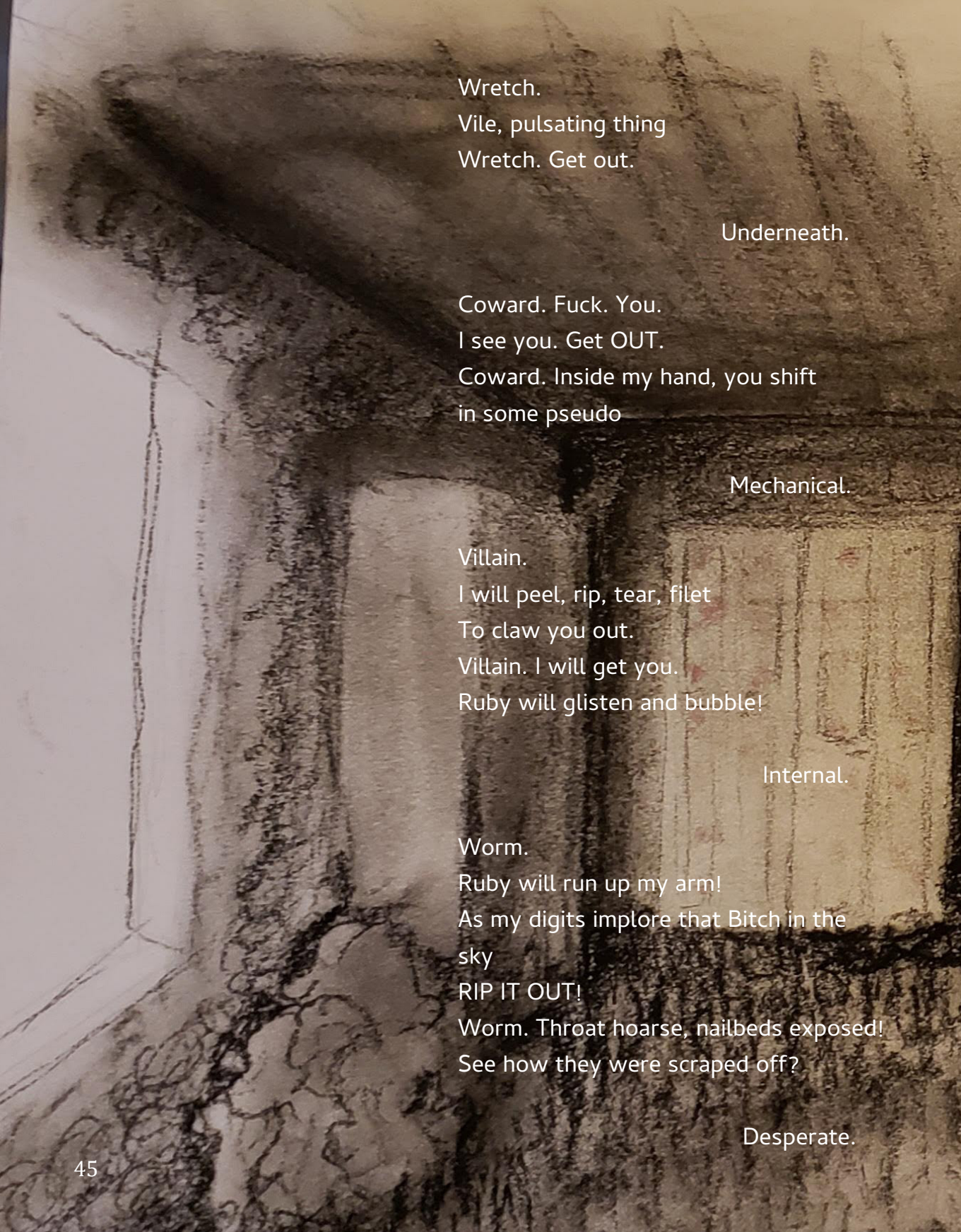
The survivors
unaware of the dangers
slink their slack selves along.

And I'd like to think
they know why they do

for when it rains
is the day i will cross
the water bridge

And sweet thing
I don't think you know
but I won't kill you for it

though I could
with my big
boney
foot



Wretch.
Vile, pulsating thing
Wretch. Get out.

Underneath.

Coward. Fuck. You.
I see you. Get OUT.
Coward. Inside my hand, you shift
in some pseudo

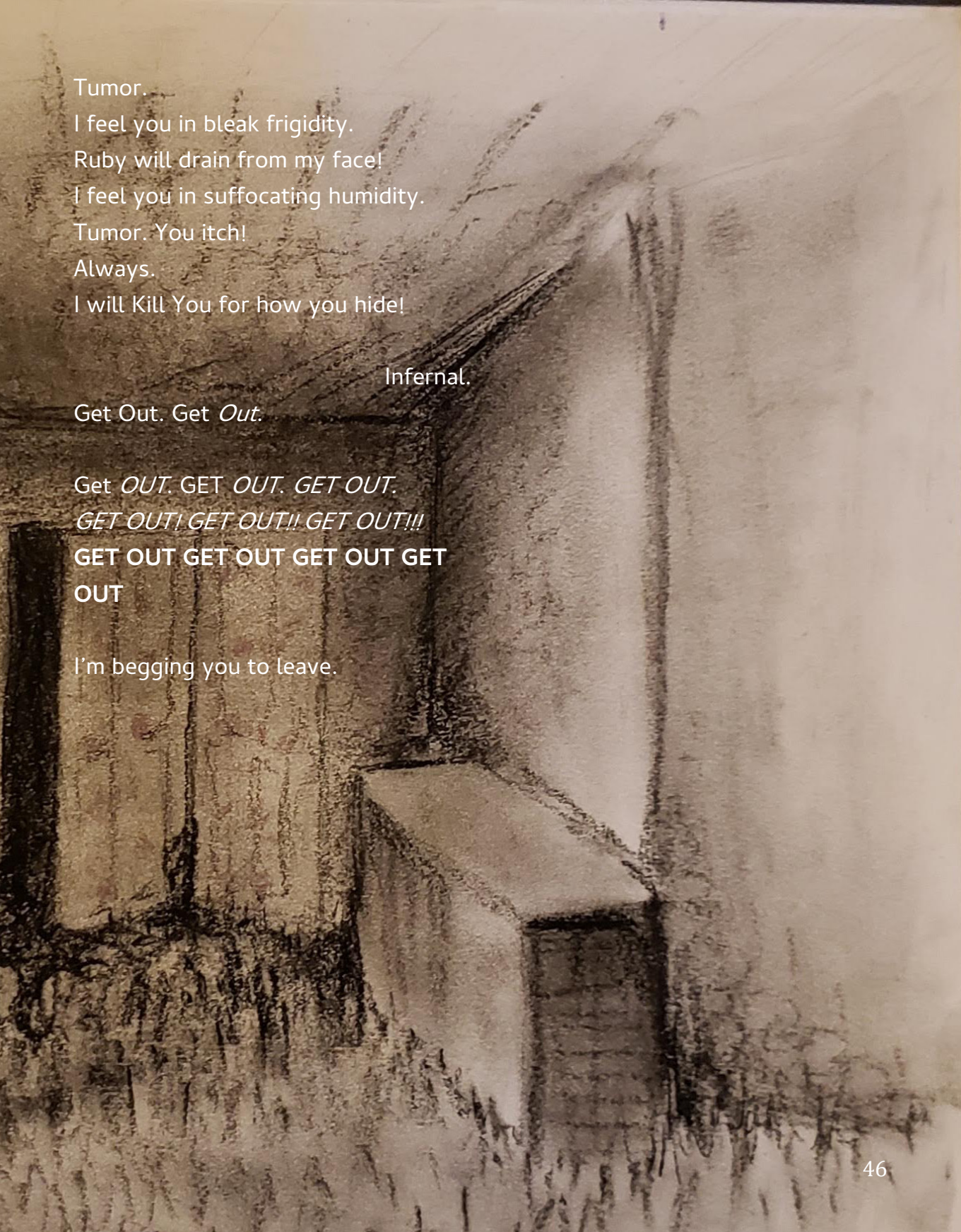
Mechanical.

Villain.
I will peel, rip, tear, filet
To claw you out.
Villain. I will get you.
Ruby will glisten and bubble!

Internal.

Worm.
Ruby will run up my arm!
As my digits implore that Bitch in the sky
RIP IT OUT!
Worm. Throat hoarse, nailbeds exposed!
See how they were scraped off?

Desperate.



Tumor.
I feel you in bleak frigidity.
Ruby will drain from my face!
I feel you in suffocating humidity.
Tumor. You itch!
Always.
I will Kill You for how you hide!

Infernal.

Get Out. Get *Out.*

Get *OUT.* GET *OUT. GET OUT.*
GET OUT! GET OUT!! GET OUT!!!
GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT

I'm begging you to leave.

There's deep comfort in the past
It's as if I'm slipping into an old sweater that still carries the scent of home

My memories don't just return they embrace me,
Like arms reaching out
Like a mother gathering her child closer,
enfolding me in the softness of yesterday's light

They whisper warmth into my bones,
reminding me of summer fields and lullabies at dusk

But sweetness stings.
I'm no longer the little girl with wind tangled pigtails,
riding shotgun in papa's pickup,
laughing as gravel kicks up behind us,

The fields are gone
paved over by time and necessity
And now, when fever sets in or the world grows too loud,
there is no hand on my forehead
no voice to hum me to sleep

employee of the month

HIS BUTTERFLIES

he wears his scars
beneath lacy,
gray butterflies.
fluttering on his skin, they dance
to the sweets at a vintage field.
        his old scars burst
        beneath lacy,
        gray butterflies.

some days, he finds
those butterflies
in red sharpies—
his childhood self drew because
red made his poetry pretty.
        today, he finds
        those butterflies
        in red sharpies.

but as he wraps
himself with those
old butterflies,
springtime flowers luster on wings
and remind him of his meadow—
        he gladly wraps
        himself with those
        old butterflies.

oV